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ABSTRACT

Because there is concern with undergraduate writing deficiencies, and because college of education faculties are sometimes unclear as to what specific problems students encounter, a study attempted to determine what specific problems in students' writing are encountered by education professors at the University of Saskatchewan. Another goal of the study was to discover any relationships among the professors' perceptions of student writing problems, their course writing requirements, and their own attitudes towards language. Thirty-three full time faculty members completed a form that elicited information about department, course level taught, and types and number of required exams and assignments. The questionnaire also contained student writing error types that the respondents checked, ranked, and added to, and a 38-item language attitude survey (Kean and Personke). Finally, respondents were asked to collect and submit for study samples of student writing. Results indicated that student writing in the college of education was reasonably healthy, although recurring errors that need constant attention existed. Other conclusions included: (1) all faculty could assist students by responding to student writing rather than simply assigning grades; (2) faculty and students need to understand the writing process; (3) students need guidelines for writing in the argumentative mode and for understanding the criteria on which their writing is being evaluated; (4) faculty need to be familiar with the distinctions between the various aspects of writing; and (5) faculty need to evaluate the types of major assignments and examinations that make up course requirements. (Survey instruments and examples of student writing errors are appended.) (CRH)

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ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION PROFESSORS TO STUDENT WRITING

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Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, New York, March 29-31, 1984.

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ATTITUDES OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION PROFESSORS AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT WRITING

Introduction

There is current widespread concern among university professors about the writing deficiencies of undergraduate students. In a College of Education, charged with the responsibility of preparing elementary and secondary teachers, this concern is particularly evident. The topic is voiced in conversation among faculty, and occasionally the concern is formalized in a discussion at faculty meetings or in a motion of some program committee.

Often it is unclear what the issues and problems discussed really are. Professors sometimes speak in generalities and it is difficult to determine just what specific aspects of student writing are causing the difficulties as perceived.

My purpose in undertaking this study is to determine just what College of Education professors at the University of Saskatchewan perceive as problems in students' writing. My interest was to determine the specifics of perceived student writing problems. However, I also wanted to discover if any relationships existed between professors' perceptions of student writing problems, the types of written course requirements they establish for students, and their own attitudes toward language.

Many institutions have taken direct action to the perceived

student writing problem. We read of remedial writing programs for students identified from compulsory university entrance writing examination results as being in need of help. Research has been conducted of student writing and written language deficiences and patterns of errors have been found; certain types of problems recur at many educational levels.

In response to perceived student writing deficiencies, many universities in North America have introduced mandatory writing examinations for incoming students. In Canada both the University of Toronto, and very recently the University of Alberta - Canada's two largest universities - require all students to sit for a writing test upon entry. In the case of the University of Alberta this requirement includes incoming transfer students (from other tertiary education institutions) and foreign students. Remedial programs have been in place for several years in some Canadian universities.

Design and Procedures

An extensive survey questionnaire was prepared (Appendix A) for faculty members to complete. It was distributed at the beginning of the first term of the 1983-84 academic year. Respondents were requested to complete the survey questionnaire by the end of the first term, and they were encouraged to collect and attach samples of student writing during that time.

Anonymity was guaranteed on the questionnaire and in the reporting of results, though some respondents voluntarily made themselves known and/or commented profusely. (One person even "corrected" the questionnaire!) Mid-way through the term a written reminder went out to all faculty, and in January 1984 the writer went around in person knocking on doors and urging recalcitrants to reply that week. That venture resulted in six additional responses.

The questionnaire asked for a considerable amount of data. Respondents were asked to indicate their departments, the levels of course(s) taught, whether or not they required written examinations in their courses, the types of examinations set, and types of assignments set. Then came a detailed listing of student writing errors which respondents checked, ranked, and to which they added their own and/or gave examples of collected student writing to illustrate error types.

Finally respondents were asked to complete a 38-item language attitude inventory (Appendix B). Responses to the attitude inventory were guaranteed for confidentiality and anonymity. Respondents indicated agreement or disagreement with each of the 38 statements. Agreement for each item indicated either a "traditional" or "linguistic" attitude toward that item.

Survey questionnaires were distributed to all full-time faculty members in the College of Education during the 1983-84

academic year minus those on sabbatical or other leave. Full-time faculty are those with continuing appointments and who may be tenured or untenured members. Excluded were persons on one-year or term appointments such as sessional and term lecturers. Table 1 gives the numbers of persons receiving survey questionnaires in each department of the College of Education.

Insert Table 1 about here

Analysis

Data on the questionnaire were of three types. Respondents were asked to check boxes which corresponded to their situation or perception. These responses were coded and tallied onto a master copy of the questionnaire.

Second, respondents were also asked to rank order items which dealt specifically with types of student writing errors. Respondents checked types of errors and then ranked those checked from a "1" for most frequently occurring to the least frequently occurring. Rankings varied from one respondent to another according to the number of items checked.

In order to code the ranking the following procedure was used. If a respondent ranked three items then the item ranked first would be coded with a value of three, the item ranked second would be coded with a value of two, and the last ranked item would

be coded with a value of one. If five items were ranked, the first ranked would be given a value of five, and so on. Thus values given for ranked items are not tallies but are weighted values.

The third type of data was written. It was of two varieties. First came student writing problems and errors which respondents had encountered but which did not appear as codable items on the questionnaire. These items were collected verbatim for each category. Second came actual examples of student errors such as spelling, and student writing samples. These were all collected verbatim in each of the categories. They are reported in their entirety in Appendix D.

Added to the questionnaire was the language attitude inventory. This was "marked" by using a key provided by the designers (Kean & Personke, 1976). Agreements and disagreements for items were marked individually as either displaying a "traditional" or "linguistic" attitude. All traditional and linguistic markings were totalled, and the predominance of one over the other out of the total of 38 items resulted in a decision of either a traditional or linguistic attitude towards language for the respondent.

Results

A total of 33 questionnaires were received. The breakdown of

responses by department is shown in Table 2. This represents a return rate of 45 percent.

Insert Table 2 about here

However, not all 73 members of faculty receiving questionnaires were in a position to respond. Two professors taught courses in the French language. Three professors were in the field supervising student teachers in the extended practicum program. Three administrators did no teaching during the first term and therefore could not respond. One person was assigned program counselling responsiblities and was not in a position to fill out the questionnaire.

Removal of the nine persons described above leaves a response rate of 52 per cent which is reasonable for a questionnaire survey. By department the best response rates were from Curriculum Studies and Educational Administration. The former department is the one in which the writer resides; this factor might have operated to influence the return rate. The poorest response rates were from the departments of Educational Psychology and Educational Foundations, though one response from each of these departments was thorough.

The questionnaire required more time to complete than the writer had anticipated. Several persons commented on the time

commitment; one suggested that two hours was needed to properly complete the questionnaire. One faculty member also stated that the questionnaire demanded of the respondent sophisticated knowledge of grammar and terminology. He avoided the questionnaire for this reason. His response to the questionnaire might explain why others did not respond even with written reminders and a personal visit.

Courses Taught

There was a good balance between junior courses taught (first year and second year) with 22 responses, and senior courses (third and fourth years) with 25 responses. Also, a fair balance existed between compulsory or core program courses (18 responses) and elective courses (22 responses). Therefore the results should be representative of undergraduate courses throughout the four years of the elementary and secondary programs, and of student choice of courses.

Examinations

Almost all instructors required written midterm examinations (27 responses) and final examinations (31 responses). At the University of Saskatchewan final examinations are required unless an individual professor applies for an exemption. This likely occurred in two instances.

The most common type of written examination was one requiring

short essays, defined as those requiring less than 30 minutes to write. Exactly two-thirds (22) professors used this type of examination. Next came the lengthy essay requiring 30 to 60 minutes of writing time (15 responses), followed by paragraph answers (12 responses). Sentence length answers and multiple choice formats were checked by seven and six respondents respectively.

It seems clear that Education professors are requiring students to write in essay format with connected discourse, where students are required to substantiate a topic or issue and develop a written response which requires organization of content and thought.

Class size certainly determines the type of examination used. One could hypothesize that professors teaching smaller classes - in the vicinity of 30 students - are more apt to use essay format examinations, while perofessors teaching large classes - 40 or more students - are predisposed to using sentence response and multiple choice format examinations.

Written Assignments

All but two respondents used written assignments as part of course evaluations. Courses in audio-visual production would lend themselves to having students prepare materials rather than write essays. The most common type of assignment was described as the

critical analysis paper (15 responses). This type of assignment demands an argumentive mode of discourse, including a definite structuring of the paper, and the need to arrive at a conclusive statement which logically follows from the argument.

Three types of assignments were all equally popular. The research paper requiring review of literature was used by 12 professors; the research report which reports original research done by or in conjunction with the student was used by 11 respondents. Original research at the undergraduate level is limited in scope. It might include the conducting of an experiment with children, conducting a small survey using a particular instructional mode or materials especially developed, or replicating part of a research study conducted and reported earlier.

The conceptual development paper made up the major type of written assigned issued by 11 respondents. This paper also requires the argumentive mode of discourse. Least used of the codable types of assignments was the literature review (6 responses).

In the "other" section there were six responses for major types of assignments used. Each was reported by one person only, and included having students write and analyze a journal, write a detailed case study, program and run a statistics file on the computer, write a "controlled research" report, write about/from

personal reflection, and write/make up projects and reports.

The major type of written course assignment was that requiring the argumentive mode of discourse or the research report format. These types of assignments are required in junior and senior level courses. There are particular conventions demanded by these two modes of discourse relating to the stance of the writer, the structuring of the whole essay as well as individual paragraphs or sections, the ability to be critical yet tentative in arriving at generalizations, and the ability to reach a concluding statement following a logical development of an argument or thesis.

Perceived Problems and Deficiences in Undergraduate Student Writing

This section formed the bulk of the questionnaire. It is organized under subheadings which point to particular aspects of writing such as syntax, usage, conceptualization, organization, and mechanics. Reporting of results is organized under these five subheadings.

Respondents were asked to check boxes, add their own areas of concern, and give actual examples from students' writings. All of these data will be reported under each subheading.

1. Problems in Syntactic Construction

The data for this section are provided in Table 3. All nine

specified areas were checked with no wide variance between them.

Insert Table 3 about here

Sentence fragments and verb tense seemed to appear slightly more often than the others. When rankings are considered there are two aspects that appear equally in terms of wide occurrence. They are sentence fragments and run-on sentences. Following close in ranked occurrence are comma splices and pronoun reference.

The first three of these problems are all of the sentence variety. They may result from the writer losing focus of the subject of the sentence whilst composing and neglecting to go back to reread the sentence. Sentence fragments may result from a desire to add information which is antecedent to the previous sentence. This is an add-on approach to writing. They may also result from the student simply writing thoughts as they come to mind. The writer does not pause to integrate the thoughts and structure them before commiting them to paper. Nor does the writer attempt to integrate one sentence or idea with another. Sentence fragment writing, as with comma splices and run on sentence writing, will likely read as disjointed, fragmented, and even desultory.

There were interesting comments made in the "other" segment of this section. One respondent added that students used

prepositions for adjectives, such as "like" in "like I said". Several other respondents also confused usage with syntactic construction and included usage items in this segment. For example, one stated that correct usage "implys (sic) collective nouns take a singular verb." The example given was "The team is in trouble. Edmonton is in town for a football game" as opposed to "Edmonton are in town..."

Syntactic construction problems under "other" were vague. Comments such as "Awkward sentence construction; appear to start on an idea and then add qualifying phrases or inappropriate points", and "Awkward, clumsy sentence structure" are used. One person mentioned a lack of variety in the types of sentences used.

2. Problems in Usage

I have already shown that there exists some confusion between usage and syntax. The results for problems in usage appear in Table 4. The use of possessives created most problems (23 responses) followed by the careless omission of words or parts of words (18 responses), then the use of adjectives for adverb and vice versa (17 responses).

Insert Table 4 about here

When rankings are considered the use of possessives still

comes out as being the most commonly perceived problem, followed by the careless omission of words or parts of words, then adjective for adverb and vice versa.

Problems with the use of the possessive probably results from students overcompensating when unsure. They tend to use the apostrophe 's' when uncertain, and consequently overgeneralize to instances when it is incorrect. Labov (1964) used the term "hypercorrection" for a similar tendency at the phonological level.

Careless omission of words or parts of words likely occurs because students neglect to proofread. If students could develop the habit of proofreading their papers, and then have someone else proofread, problems such as these might well be eliminated or substantially reduced.

The adjective for adverb and vice versa is common in casual speech; the "good-well", "nice-nicely" distinction is one which is not made in informal talk, but it is necessary to make the distinction in formal writing. Students are often not familiar with the formal usage demands of academic writing; the problem suggests a nonfamiliarity with levels of usage.

In the "other" section respondents noted such problems as "slangy expression" and "colloquial usage, e.g. each and every one". These problems are of the same type as noted in the preceding paragraph. They result from a failure to make the

distinction between informal speech where colloquialism and slang are appropriate, and formal writing where they are inappropriate because they are less precise and offend the reader. One person mentioned "semantically inappropriate words" as a problem which seems to indicate that word choice or precision of vocabulary was in question.

In certain subject areas or disciplines there are words which have specific meanings in that academic context, and students who fail to use the exact word might be penalized. Subject-specific vocabulary in many instances has to be learned.

Yet another respondent mentioned problems with appropriate word choice, particularly with denotative and connotative meaning. How extensive this problem is is difficult to estimate; the "other" section was ranked lowest of all problems in usage. One person confused usage with syntactic construction and commented on the use of short sentences.

3. Problems in conceptualization

Problems of conceptualization point to the inability of the writer to conceive the problem, theory or argument, to structure the written response, and to clearly address the topic and audience. The data for problems in conceptualization appear in Table 5.

Insert Table 5 About here

Lack of logical development was the greatest problem and was ranked considerably higher than any other problem. Second was ideas or arguments not leading to the stated or logical conclusion; this problem is closely linked with lack of logical development. Paucity of ideas and use of unrelated ideas were third as perceived problems of conceptualization. Ranking equally second were paucity of ideas, and ideas or argument not leading to the stated or logical conclusion.

The major problem as perceived seems to be with the development of an argumentive paper, and as part of that development, choice of ideas, and the ordering of ideas to lead to a sound, well-argued conclusion. Paucity of ideas might be related to the inability to select appropriate ideas and to offer supporting or secondary but related ideas.

By way of comment one respondent made an interesting and, from the writer's experience, significant statement to the effect that there is a preoccupation with wanting to please the professor by attempting to adopt uncritically the professor's point of view. This person also commented that argument backings are vague.

Professors would certainly perceive a paucity of ideas where students offer a professor's perspective and draw on nothing else

to substantiate that perspective. The hope of many professors is that students read widely and develop a variety of perspectives on an issue, topic, problem, theory, or area of research. Students need to feel secure in taking a broad perspective even when it would seem to be at variance with that of a professor. It is the efficacy with which the student argues the issue that must be judged by the professor, and students need to be aware of a professor's intentions in judging argumentive writing.

4. Problems in Organization

Problems in organization relate to the actual writing of a paper after the student has conceived of the argument or thesis. Problems of conceptualization are, of course, manifest in the actual writing, but problems in organization occur in the design and organizational aspects of the written product. The data for problems in organization are shown in Table 6.

Insert Table 6 about here

The most commonly perceived problem in this area, accounting also for the highest rated problem, was the inability of students to organize an argument or thesis. Three other aspects followed: inability to substantiate an argument or thesis, nonevidence of an introductory statement of purpose, and nonevidence of a summary

statement. Careless or needless repetition followed as a third area of concern. When ranked, inability to substantiate an argument or thesis was the second problem as commonly perceived.

Given these perceived problems it seems that students are unfamiliar with the organization of an argumentive piece of writing. Part of that problem might be different expectations among faculty of what constitutes an acceptable format for writing an argument. Perhaps faculty guidelines would help. If collegial agreement on a common format for argumentive writing is not manageable, students need to be made aware of what individual professors, or departments, require as format for argumentive writing.

In the "other" section one respondent wrote that ideas are not grouped but are often mentioned in one place, then mentioned again almost as an afterthought further on. There was much copying, and very little credit given for ideas. Students who copy would seem to display an inability to incorporate ideas and readings into their own thinking.

5. Mechanical Problems

Mechanical problems are those which bear little or no relationship to conceptualization or organization of an essay. Such problems in minor degree would not be cause for serious concern; in major degree then detract from what might otherwise be

a soundly-conceived and well-organized essay. The data for mechanical problems appear in Table 7.

Insert Table 7 about here

Spelling was perceived as the most common problem, followed by punctuation. When rated punctuation was slightly ahead of spelling; together they accounted for most concern by professors. An extensive list of common spelling errors was compiled from examples offered by many respondents, and is contained in Appendix C.

Clearly, an abundance of spelling errors in students' essays is cause for many professors to question the quality of the arguments developed in those papers. Mechanics, when they reach epidemic proportions, probably result in a lower grade than would otherwise be given if the same paper was purged of such errors.. Grobe (1981), in a study of quality ratings of high school students' narrative essays, found that the best predictors of teachers' ratings were composition length and freedom from spelling errors. Over three different grade levels spelling was the most powerful predictor of quality scores.

Many mechanical problems such as spelling and punctuation could be eliminated if students proofread their papers, and then had a good speller and writer proofread the paper also.

Eleventh-hour composing of assignments usually mitigates against proofreading.

Several respondents made comments to the effect that the most common confusion was between the use of the colon, semicolon and comma. Such confusion would also account for comma splices and run-on sentences. One person mentioned a problem with the organization of paragraphs, and the lack of topic sentences.

One professor commented that he really didn't worry about these matters (mechanics), but asked simply, "Did you proofread?", and recommended that students show their papers to another person for editing.

Positive Aspects of Student Writing

Education professors are not yet at the point of dismissing students as being illiterate. When all comments about positive aspects of student writing were compiled there were 4 1/2 pages of compact writing. In most instances I will allow the respondents to speak for themselves; in other instances I will paraphrase and summarize recurring remarks. (Numbers after quoted comments identify questionnaire responses.)

There does exist the temptation to seek a scapegoat for what is perceived as the inadequate preparation of students to manage the written language demands of university work. High schools and elementary schools are often serve such a function. The belief is

also evident that the university should not become involved in the remediation of student writing deficiences. The university sets its standards - in fact departments or individual professors do this - and it is up to students to meet them. Should students need remedial help in writing, as evident in poor grades for written work, then the seeking of such help is the responsibility of individual students.

The issue of university and professorial responsibility for student writing standards is one that deserves debate at several levels - within departments, at the college level, and at the university level. Several comments make direct or implicit reference to this issue. The following is an example:

> In spite of their deficiencies, students are willing to write. If elementary and secondary teachers placed a little more emphasis on the discipline of language and a little less on the enjoyment of language, students might arrive here with skills that we expect. Schools appear to have moved from one unfortunate extreme to the other unfortunate extreme. (04)

There also exists the tendency for faculty members to compare today's students with those of a generation or more ago. Members of faculty who have been teaching for 10 or more years are able to develop this perspective. Many comments began with or developed a comparative stance.

> Unlike the students enrolled in the university during the 1960's and early 70's, today's students recognize the importance of the proper use of the English language. They are making efforts to improve their writing ability. (17)

> I find that many of the present students are more conscious of writing mechanics. Students seem to be better able to organize and synthesize material researched for papers. Perhaps, one can look back at the students from the perspective that they seem to show more concern and care about written work. (25)

> Students are writing more languages today and thus there is a tendency to mix languages. There is not such a priggish attitude that English is the only "language" of expression. (27)

> Student writing is generally very good and certainly no worse than 10 years ago. As a higher percentage of students come to high school and university our expectations must be realistically lowered somewhat. (30)

> I have not noticed any major changes over the last five years - but I would like to say that the quality of writing does not seem to be getting better, it is holding at best - perhaps slipping a bit. (33)

Several respondents commented on what they saw as a conciliatory attitude in student writing. Students, they saw, bowed too much to external authority in their writing, and this attitude resulted in poor argumentive writing. Sometimes the authority was the professor; at other times it was a noted writer, researcher, or theorist.

> Among the students, there is a greater acceptance of external authority and the value of substantiated fact premises in the development of an argument than the "I believe" stance of the previous generation. I think there has been an improvement in the unity. (17)

> What I noticed most frequently was a strong opening or introductory sentence and a strong closing sentence. (What was in between was the problem.) They can write almost perfectly - even to the punctuation - anything which they have been told to "know" and which they interpret as "memorize". (31)

On several occasions comments were made which compared junior (first and second year) students to senior (third and fourth year) students, after degree students, or graduate students. Such comments suggested a change in the quality of student argumentive writing over the duration of their university education. Such comments also imply that perceived student writing problems may exist to different degrees at different levels and that the problems are really confined to the junior years.

> Second year students tend to believe that whatever is written is true, especially what they write themselves. Senior students are more self-critical. (03)

> Generally, handwriting and spelling of words used are sufficient. Ideas are usually conveyed in an acceptable way. What may be the major shortcoming is paucity of ideas in thought, let alone writing of them. Level of vocabulary is generally acceptable - higher level than that of a high school student (generally). Level of A.D. (after degree) students' writing is generally higher than that of second year level. Despite noting some of the shortcomings in writing..., the frequency of those errors generally is not high for a group. It appears to me that a few students require some specific attention to some particular needs. (14)

> The comments and evaluation on the preceding pages (of the questionnaire) do not apply to all students. In fact, at the fourth year level I find that most produce fairly acceptable products. This does not mean that writing ability is at high levels (i.e. appropriate to the graduate level), but that most can communicate effectively. (16)

Although the survey was aimed specifically at the undergraduate level, some faculty members teach courses at the graduate level along with their undergraduate responsibilities

during the same term. One person compared undergraduate writing problems to graduate writing difficulties.

> Students at the graduate level do a fairly good job of reviewing relevant research. The key problems are conceptualization of the topic, organization, and transition...the latter in particular. (18)

There were also comments of a general nature, and these give a clear picture of positive aspects of student writing. These comments could be relayed directly to students as a way of introducing the need to give greater attention to organizing, composing, and proofreading for improved argumentive writing.

> Many students wrote clearly and concisely with effective paragraphing. I recall students who wrote well but not concisely as their style was more like that of a fictional (?) writer. On many examinations I noted that students had prepared an outline first which usually resulted in a well organized essay answer. I never found incorrect use of capitalization to be a problem. (08)

> The identification of "faults" above (in the questionnaire) makes it appear that I take a negative view of the ability of my students to write acceptable themes. Such is NOT the case. I simply identified those errors appearing in a small minority of papers. Most of my students: a) have good ideas; 2) express them clearly; c) are concise - at the expense of some fragmentary sentences. (11)

> Some students are able to express ideas freely. Some use a style of expression which is fresh and innovative. (12)

> Organization - logical, clear, use of examples, introductory and concluding statements. Concise answers. Well developed sentences. (15)

> In many ways I do not find papers without merit. For the time our students dedicate to the process of research and writing, many of the products are

> competent, if not amazing - quite a few demonstrating a professional flair. A problem I have in knowing if the presentation is the students' or the author's. Thus the many strengths I note may well be a mirage, but I have seen spontaneous writing, i.e. exams that impress me. Is it their innate ability to use written language? (24)

> There are many positive aspects exhibited in student writing. There does seem to be a search for the most expressive and explicit means of expressing oneself. There is a sincerity and an attempt to escape bombast and show. I note the questionnaire has pedantically listed all the possible weaknesses while it has omitted to list all the possible strengths of student writing. Is is possible that the questionnaire is biased? (27)

> Students are able to get their ideas across although those ideas are often restricted to the textbook author's suggestion or a resource reference or two. The majority of students assemble (organize) their ideas around a topic well, and develop their arguments in a coherent, related fashion. Spelling and usage difficulties, where they exist for a small number of students, may probably arise from the confusion between British and American practice (practise). (30)

I will end this section on student writing strengths with two comments. The first articulates a cautionary yet positive perspective, and the second describes a procedure which seems worthy of consideration when dealing especially with mechanics.

> It must be remembered that many students write very well. We tend to make comments about students who write poorly. Many students write excellent papers: 1) good organization; 2) good conceptualization; 3) good indication of psychological soundness and insights into content produced; 4) good ability to relate materials to self; 5) good ability to provide sound rationale and persuasive arguments to substantiate a point of view. (33)

> Because of the screening procedure for admission to the core classes the majority of fourth year and graduate students .I have taught, write well. If they have

problems with spelling I am only concerned if spelling errors appear in essays which should have been proof-read. (I always suggest that poor spellers obtain help from someone who is a reliable speller, to proof-read for them).
Handwriting is only a problem if illegible - in which case I warn the student involved, that if I can't read it, I place it at the bottom of the pile, and consequently will mark it when I'm at my lowest ebb! It's in their own best interests to write so that I can read what they have written. (29)

Professors' Attitudes Toward Language

Language Attitude Inventory

The Language Attitude Inventory (Kean & Personke, 1976, pp. 8-11) is not a test. It comprises 38 statements about language that have been shown to elicit patterns of responses indicating either a "linguistic" or "traditional" point of view toward language on the part of thousands of preservice and inservice teachers who have taken the inventory. The statements offer room for debate, and some statements measure knowledge as well as attitude, but nevertheless every statement has proved effective in reflecting respondents' viewpoints.

It is highly unlikely that anyone would respond 100 percent in one direction or another. Answers most likely reflect a trend in one direction or the other. (The Language Attitude Inventory and Key can be found in Appendix B.)

A traditional perspective would describe a person who adheres to definite rules of grammar, makes few distinctions between

grammar and usage, uses an analytic approach to the description of language, and describes usage in terms of correct/incorrect with reference to the rules of grammar. A linguistic prespective would include awareness of grammar as distinct from usage, a notion of appropriateness and inappropriateness of language forms according to situation, and a functional rather than analytic approach to the description of language.

Results

A total of 28 faculty voluntarily completed the language attitude inventory. This represents 85 percent of the 33 survey returns, a larger percentage than this writer expected! The data for returns appear in Table 8. All responses but one showed a linguistic point of view; one anonymous response was exactly centered between traditional and linguistic.

Insert Table 8 about here

The results are as one might expect among a university faculty of teacher educators. Many respondents were eager to debate some statements judging from the comments written beside those statements. Such comments, some of which showed a predilection to agree and disagree given a particular context for the statement, showed a definite awareness of sociolinguistics,

that language cannot be set apart from the situation in which it occurs. Respondents wishing to agree or disagree with a statement given a situation were aware that usage is a function of the informal or formal demands of language, in either the oral or written mode. They saw such statements as neither right nor wrong, correct or incorrect, but rather as appropriate or inappropriate given the context.

Since all responses showed a linguistic point of view I selected three responses to look at closely. One was the only response which was centred exactly between the traditional and linguistic points of view; one was a response that was almost totally linguistic, and the third was one that represented the majority response, that is, having between 23 and 26 statements as linguistic and the other 12 to 15 statements as traditional.

The respondent who had 19 traditional responses and 19 linguistic responses was anonymous - his or her department was not coded. Unfortunately this person answered the questionnaire by checkmarks but offered no comments except for two items. Under the "other" section of problems in syntactic construction was included "spelling" and "word usage", neither of which is a syntactic feature. This person used the lengthy essay format in examinations, had students write a review of research paper as the major course assignment, and ranked as perceived major student writing problems spelling and the inability to organize an

argument or thesis.

The 'typical' response to the language attitude inventory is represented by a faculty member from the Department of Educational Psychology with 25 linguistic responses and 12 traditional responses. This person made comments on the response sheet but did not attach any samples of student writing. For examinations this professor used short essay, paragraph, and multiple choice formats. In terms of major written assignments a variety was checked - research review paper, literature review, critical analysis paper, and conceptual development paper.

Major student problems noted were sentence fragments/incomplete sentences, verb tense (wrong form, improper sequence, needless shift), carelessly omitted words or parts of words, lack of logical development in conceptualizing a paper, inability to organize an argument or thesis in organizing a paper, and spelling.

This person found much to say that was positive about student writing. He or she began by stating that many students write very well, and that we tend to comment about students who write poorly. As evidence of quality writing several points were made - organization, conceptualization, ability to provide sound rationale and persuasive arguments to substantiate a point of view, and ability to relate materials to self.

Interestingly, organization and conceptualiation were checked

by many respondents as major problems in student writing, which suggests that these are major problems for a minority of students. That the same aspects are strengths in good writers is implied. This person did not see any major change in student writing quality over the past five years; student writing today did not seem to be getting better.

At the "high" end of the linguistic point of view was a response from a faculty member from the Department of Curriculum Studies with 35 linguistic responses and three traditional responses. This person has students write lengthy essay examinations of at least half-hour writing time per question. The major written course assignment consists of a conceptual development paper. The major writing problems encountered were sentence fragments/incomplete sentences, carelessly omitted words or parts of words, lack of logical development in conceptualizing a paper, careless or needless repetition in organizing a paper, and spelling.

For student writing strengths this person mentioned that organization is logical and clear, that students use examples, and that they include introductory and concluding statements. Answers are concise, and sentences are well-developod. No other comments were given nor were examples of student writing attached or written.

To what extent these three are typical is speculative.

However, there are several differences worthy of discussion.

All three perceived the same types of major student writing problems. The "typical" and "high" linguistic respondents rated virtually identical problems, but both also noted positive aspects of student writing. In fact, there were aspects of student writing such as organization of a paper, repetition, and conciseness that were rated as major problems and as writing strengths. This suggests that these two persons considered such aspects of student writing to be crucial in the development of a sound piece of academic work; they looked for these features in student writing.

There were some differences in the types of examinations and assignments given, but nothing conclusive can be deduced. Both "centred" and "high" linguistic respondents noted that lengthy essay examinations were used, while the "typical" respondent used a variety of examination questions including multiple choice. The "high" linguistic respondent used the conceptual development paper as a major course assignment in writing; the "typical" respondent used a variety of types, while the "centred" person used the research review paper.

Discussion and Conclusions

1. Argumentive and Reporting Modes

These two modes predominated as the types of discourse

demanded in course assignments. The major problems relating to conceptualization and organization of student writing had to do with the argumentive mode, and to a lesser extent the reporting mode.

It was quite clear that professors perceived often that students were unable to successfully deal with the requirements for argumentive writing - generation of relevant ideas; organization of ideas into topical ideas and supplementary ideas; logical development of ideas and argument; ability to conceive of and address a particular audience; statement of purpose; summary of argument; focus on task. Students need to be taught the requirements of the argumentive mode; each professor requiring this mode of discourse might be advised to spend some lecture time outlining the requirements and procedures for writing in the argumentive and/or reportive mode. (9)

Perhaps a more reasonable approach to teaching students what is expected in argumentive writing is to pursue common faculty agreement on an approach to student argumentive writing. Guidelines, approved by faculty, might be distributed to all students at the beginning of each term. Along with the guidelines it might be advisable to provide some models of effective argumentive writing; these models might be examples of good student writing from previous years. All professors could be encouraged to collect exemplary pieces of student writing which

would be made available to students in subsequent terms and years.

2. Evaluation of Argumentive Writing

When a major written assignment is given it is often advisable to admonish students of the criteria used to evaluate the assignment. Where the assignment requires students to use the argumentive mode, to what extent will the professor evaluate aspects of the writing such as ideas, logical development, notion of audience, and so on?

If there is a faculty-wide attempt to develop guidelines for student writing in the argumentive mode as suggested in #1, it might be also advisable to develop guidelines for evaluation. This writer envisions an analytic scale (see Cooper in Cooper and Odell, 1977, pp. 3-31) where individual professors can add elements, and where they can differentially weight elements according to the particular subject and topic demands.

3. Conceptualization of Ideas

A recurring comment was that students develop a narrow perspective in their writing; they rely upon a central authority to carry their argument, and this reliance is often too narrow and restrictive. Moreover, the central authority is often the professor who teaches the course! This tendency bothered a number of respondents.

Students need to be encouraged to read widely and to develop

a variety of perspectives from which they can draw when responding to an issue or problem in a paper, or on an examination. They need to be made aware that a soundly-developed and well-reasoned argument considers as many arguments or perspectives as possible or as exist, but weighs the evidence, or judges the validity of competing arguments, and arrives at a well-founded summary conclusion.

In order to develop the eclectic approach described in the preceding paragraph students must be assured that the professor's evaluation of the essay will encourage such an approach. They should not fear that arriving at a conclusion which is contrary to the professor's stated or implied position will penalize the student. Well-developed evaluation guidelines will help to ensure fairness in grading an argument that is well written.

4. Proofreading and Editing

Some respondents noted that they advise students to proofread and edit papers before submitting them. To what extent this practice is common is unknown. Students need to be made aware that proofreading and editing are essential parts of the writing process; a first draft of a paper is a working draft, not the final submission to the professor.

Proofreading should be first by the writer who looks for aspects of syntax, vocabulary, phrasing, coherence, spelling, and

mechanics. Then a second draft is prepared and given to a second reader who reads as the intended audience of the paper. Given this type of response the writer re-edits the paper.

This type of procedure can be encouraged. Some professors might even consider refusing to mark papers that have clearly been written at the last minute and lack even cursory proofreading. Guidelines for proofreading and editing can be provided when professors assign major written course requirements.

5. Grammar and Usage

It became clear from comments made by respondents under the perceived writing problems section of the questionnaire that some confusion exists between grammar and usage. Usage items were described under the syntactic construction section, and vice versa to a lesser extent.

If professors are to be of help to students in their writing they themselves need to be clear as to what constitutes a syntactic difficulty or problem, and what is a matter of poor choice or inappropriate language, though grammatically correct. Current handbooks on usage may be of help. Students can also be directed to consult usage handbooks when unsure of a particular usage or aspect of grammar.

However, it is of very limited use to merely point out a perceived error or problem in student writing. The person

evaluating a student paper needs to be able to describe why a problem exists, and to be able to suggest alternations be they syntactic or semantic.

6. Subject-Specific Vocabulary and Structure

To a certain extent each subject area has its own ways of using language, be they in terms of vocabulary or sentence structures. Some subject areas use pronounced linguistic patterns: the language of law (in educational administration) uses structures that employ conditional clauses; the word "culture" has very different meanings in social studies and science.

Aspects of subject-specific language need to be taught in the subject area itself. It is not always possible to assume that because a concept is basic to a particular subject that students will come to the subject already knowing the meaning of the word or structure for the concept. The same word or structure might have a very different meaning in another subject area.

Syntactic demands vary too. In social studies it is often permissible to write objectives for unit planning in terms of sentence fragments where the verb begins the sentence; for example "To have students compare means of food preparation between two different cultures." However, sentence fragments may not be tolerated by a professor in English education even when the

student is asked to develop unit plans. These types of linguistic expectations must be conveyed to students in each subject area, and indeed by individual professors within a subject area.

7. Recurrent Writing Errors

The major writing errors mentioned by respondents have a history of recurrence. These are the types of errors that cause difficulties for students year after year. Such aspects of writing are in need of constant and ongoing attention.

In 1974 Diederich found that the following errors occurred most frequently in the writing of American secondary students: sentence fragment, incomplete sentence; comma splice, fused sentence; run-on or strung-together sentences; carelessly omitted words or parts of words; careless or needless repetition; adjective for adverb and vice versa. These errors are listed in order of frequency of occurrence.

In the survey the most frequently-occurring errors were: sentence fragment, incomplete sentence; run-on or strung--together sentences; comma splice, fused sentence; pronoun reference; carelessly omitted words or parts of words; possessives.

The similarities between the two studies are striking. It seems as though the same types of errors recur in students' writings; these aspects of writing are probably not developmental and will not disappear with maturity. They present ongoing

problems for students, and constant attention must be given them by educators, including university professors.

Summary

Student writing in the College of Education is in a reasonably healthy state. There are recurring errors which need constant attention, and all faculty can assist students by responding to student writing rather than simply assigning grades.

Understanding of the writing process is one important way in which both faculty and students can better attend to writing. The writing process includes the conceptualization of the topic, the rhetorical choices made in organizing the piece of writing, and the need to proofread and edit.

Students need guidelines for writing in the argumentive mode, and they need to know the ways in which their papers are to be evaluated. Faculty also need to be familiar with the demands of writing, and the distinction between grammar, usage, and other aspects of language.

Finally, the types of examinations and major assignments set as course requirements are important, for they allow students to either write in connected discourse or not, and they also convey the importance and value that the professor places on writing to learn.

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Table 1

Number of Faculty Receiving Survey Questionnaires by Department

Department	Number
College Administrators (Dean, Associate Dean, etc).	5
Department of Educational Communications*	4
Department of Continuing Education*	3
Department of Curriculum Studies	21
Department for the Education of Exceptional Children	7
Department of Educational Administration	6
Department of Educational Foundations	5
Department of Educational Psychology	12
Indian and Northern Education Program	2
Indian Teacher Education Program	4
Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program	3
Industrial Arts and Vocational Education*	1
Total	73

*In January 1984 these three departments were amalgamated to form the Department of Educational Communications, Continuing and Vocational Education.

Table 2

Questionnaire Return by Department

Department	Number
College Administrators (Dean, Associate Dean, etc.)	1
Department of Educational Communications*	1
Department of Continuing Education*	1
Department of Curriculum Studies	15
Department for the Education of Exceptional Children	3
Department of Educational Administration	5
Department of Educational Foundations	1
Department of Educational Psychology	3
Indian and Northern Education Program	2
Indian Teacher Education Program	1
Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program	-
Industrial Arts and Vocational Education*	-
Total	33

*In January 1984 these three departments were amalgamated to form the Department of Educational Communications, Continuing and Vocational Education.

Table 3

Problems in Syntactic Construction: Tallies and Rankings

Problems in Syntactic Construction	Total Checked	Total Weighted Rankings
1. Sentence fragment, incomplete sentence.	20	50
2. Comma splice, fused sentence (main clauses joined only by a comma without a conjunction, or nothing at all).	17	47
3. Run-on or strung-together sentences (more than two main clauses unless they are short, of the same pattern, or separated by semicolons).	17	50
4. Subject-verb agreement.	17	42
5. Pronoun-antecedent agreement.	15	33
6. Pronoun reference.	15	47
7. Verb tense: wrong form, improper sequence, needless shift.	19	35
8. Parallel structure.	18	40
9. Misplaced modifiers (especially dangling participles).	14	31

Problems in Syntactic Construction	Total Checked	Total Weighted Rankings
10. Other(s) (please specify).	6	10

Table 4

Problems in Usage:

Tallies and Rankings

Problems in Usage	Total Checked	Total Weighted Rankings
1. Carelessly omitted words or parts of words, especially endings.	18	44
2. Adjective for adverb and vice versa.	17	40
3. Confusion of subject and object forms of pronouns "I", "we", "he", "she", "they", "who". (Many linguists accept "who" as an object form, especially in questions, but "whom" is not accepted as a subject form.)	15	37
4. "Shall-will", "should-would".	13	30
5. Abbreviations in sentences.	15	29
6. Contractions (such as "don't").	14	36
7. Possessives: Omitted or misplaced apostrophe ("her's", "it's", "your's").	23	47
8. Other(s) (please specify).	4	9

Table 5

Problems in Conceptualization:

Tallies and Rankings

Problems in Conceptualization	Total Checked	Total Weighted Rankings
1. Paucity of ideas.	19	57
2. Lack of logical development.	26	74
3. Lack of coherence.	18	45
4. Ideas or argument not leading to the stated or logical conclusion.	22	57
5. Inability to address the topic or subject.	13	28
6. No clear notion of audience.	12	16
7. Use of unrelated ideas and information.	19	26
8. Other(s) (please specify).	1	6

Table 6

Problems in Organization:

Tallies and Ratings

Problems in Organization	Total Checked	Total Weighted Ratings
1. Paragraphing.	18	35
2. Careless or needless repetition.	20	51
3. Inability to organize an argument or thesis.	30	81
4. Inability to substantiate an argument or thesis.	24	63
5. Nonevidence of an introductory statement of purpose.	23	46
6. Nonevidence of a summary statement.	23	45
7. Other(s) (please specify)	1	15

Table 7

Mechanical Problems:

Tallies and Ratings

Mechanical Problems	Total Checked	Total Weighted Ratings
1. Spelling (please give examples below).	27	54
2. Punctuation.	22	56
3. Capitalization.	8	22
4. Indenting of paragraphs.	6	6
5. Handwriting	16	41
6. Organization of page.	10	16
7. Use of headings and subheadings	15	28
8. Other(s) (please specify).	1	_

Table 8

Language Attitude Inventory Returns

by Department and by

Traditional-Linguistic Point of View

Department	Traditional	Linguistic	Totals
College Administrators	-	1	1
Department of Educational Communications*	-	1	1
Department of Continuing Education*	-	-	-
Department of Curriculum Studies	-	11	11
Department for the Education of Exceptional Chidren	-	3	3
Department of Educational Administration	-	4	4
Department of Educational Foundations	-	1	1
Department of Educational Psychology	-	3	3

Department	Traditional	Linguistic	Totals
Indian and Northern Education Program	-	-	-
Indian Teacher Education Education Program	-	2	2
Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program	-	-	-
Industrial Arts and Vocational Education*	-	-	-
Anonymous	- 1	1	2
Total	- 1	27	28

*In January 1984 these three departments amalgamated to form The Department of Educational Communications, Continuing and Vocational Education.

APPENDIX A

Survey Questionnaire

SURVEY OF COLLEGE OF EDUCATION PROFESSORS'
PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT WRITING DEFICIENCIES

This is a request to complete a survey of your perceptions of undergraduate students' writing deficiencies, and of the type of writing required of undergraduate students who take your courses.

The survey will likely take 30 minutes to complete. Could you please complete and return it, unsigned, to Trevor Gambell, Department of Curriculum Studies, by

There is current widespread concern among educators as a group about the writing deficiencies of undergraduate students. The concern seems to be greatest among tertiary educators, particulary at universities and colleges where academic programs predominate. The problem does not restrict itself to Education students either; faculties of arts have expressed concern at least as vehemently as have faculties of education.

Much has been written about students' written language deficiencies in the United States and some universities operate freshman writing programs. In Canada both the University of Toronto, and very recently the University of Alberta, have introduced mandatory writing tests for all incoming students including transfer and foreign students. Remedial programs have been in place for several years in some Canadian universities.

My interest is to determine just what perceptions of student writing problems have developed among College of Education professors at the University of Saskatchewan. To survey the problem I have devised the attached survey form. It is quite detailed and I have requested attachments in places, always to be made anonymously.

I am also requesting that each respondent fill out the attached Language Attitude Inventory so that I can look for possible matchings between attitudes to language and expectations for student written language. I guarantee absolute anonymity in all aspects of this survey; there is nowhere on the survey forms where you are asked to identify the course or section taught, or yourself, apart from department and level of course.

I will use the accumulated data to look for patterns of perceived student writing deficiencies, and to determine if such patterns or commonalities match with different types of writing tasks required of students. The Language Attitude Inventory will be used to determine whether a particular attitude to language matches certain types of writing tasks required of students.

My intention is to use this same survey in the Faculty of Arts and Science, and in faculties of Education on other campuses in Canada and in Australia.

If there are any questions or concerns please see me (Education 3038) or phone 343-3423.

Thanking you,

Trevor Gambell
English Education
Department of Curriculum Studies

SURVEY OF COLLEGE OF EDUCATION PROFESSORS'

PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT WRITING DEFICIENCIES

1. Department and Subject Area

   - Curriculum Studies ☐
   - Educational Communications ☐
   - Educational Administration ☐
   - Educational Foundations ☐
   - Continuing Education ☐
   - Exceptional Children ☐
   - IHEP ☐
   - ITEP ☐
   - SUNTEP ☐
   - Educational Psychology ☐

2. Course level(s) taught

   - Junior course(s) ☐
   - Senior course(s) ☐

3. Compulsory course(s)

   - Elective course(s) ☐

4. Do you use examinations which require student to write?

   - Midterm — Yes ☐ / No ☐
   - Final — Yes ☐ / No ☐

5. If students write, what type of examination? (Check major type)

   - Lengthy essay (½ to 1 hour writing time) ☐
   - Short essay ☐

.../2

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Paragraph ☐

Sentence response ☐

Sentence completion ☐

Multiple choice ☐

Other (please specify) _____ ☐

6. Do you use written assignments as part of course evaluation? (Exclude projects and preparation of curriculum materials).

Yes ☐

No ☐

Type of assignment used: (check major only)

Research paper (review) ☐

Research report (original) ☐

Literature review ☐

Critical analysis paper ☐

Conceptual development paper ☐

Other (please specify) _____ ☐

_____

7. What are the problems and deficiencies you have perceived and identified throughout your teaching experience with undergraduate students in their writing?

Please use the lists provided and add your own items and comments.

Check and rank order items wherever possible in order of occurrence, 1 being most widely occurring.

Also, please attach examples or photocopies of student writings identified by course level and department. Feel free to add marginal notes to point out problems.

.../3

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7. (a) Problem in Syntactic Construction	Check	Rank
1. Sentence fragment, incomplete sentence.	☐	☐
2. Comma splice, fused sentence (main clauses joined only by a comma without a conjunction, or nothing at all).	☐	☐
3. Run-on or strung-together sentences (more than two main clauses unless they are short, of the same pattern, or separated by semicolons).	☐	☐
4. Subject-verb agreement.	☐	☐
5. Pronoun-antecedent agreement.	☐	☐
6. Pronoun reference.	☐	☐
7. Verb tense: wrong form, improper sequence, needless shift.	☐	☐
8. Parallel structure.	☐	☐
9. Misplaced modifiers (especially dangling participles).	☐	☐
10. Other(s) (please specify) _____		
_____	☐	☐
_____		
_____	☐	☐
_____		
_____	☐	☐
_____		

.../4

55

7. (b) Problems in Usage

	Check	Rank
1. Carelessly omitted words or parts of words, especially endings.	☐	☐
2. Adjective for adverb and vice versa.	☐	☐
3. Confusion of subject and object forms of pronouns "I", "we", "he", "she", "they", "who". (Many linguists accpet "who" as an object form, especially in questions, but "whom" is not accepted as a subject form.)	☐	☐
4. "Shall-will", "should-would".	☐	☐
5. Abbreviations in sentences.	☐	☐
6. Contractions (such as "don't").	☐	☐
7. Possessives: Omitted or misplaced apostrophe ("her's", "it's", "your's").	☐	☐
8. Other(s) (please specify) _____	☐	☐
_____	☐	☐
_____	☐	☐
_____	☐	☐
_____	☐	☐
_____	☐	☐

(c) Problems in Conceptualization

1. Paucity of ideas.	☐	☐
2. Lack of logical development.	☐	☐

.../5

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7. (c) Problems in Conceptualization - Continued

	Check	Rank
3. Lack of coherence.	☐	☐
4. Ideas or argument not leading to the stated or logical conclusion.	☐	☐
5. Inability to address the topic or subject.	☐	☐
6. No clear notion of audience.	☐	☐
7. Use of unrelated ideas and information.	☐	☐
8. Other(s) (please specify) _____	☐	☐
_____	☐	☐
_____	☐	☐
_____	☐	☐
_____	☐	☐
_____	☐	☐

(d) Problems in Organization

1. Paragraphing.	☐	☐
2. Careless or needless repetition.	☐	☐
3. Inability to organize an argument or thesis.	☐	☐
4. Inability to substantiate an argument of thesis.	☐	☐
5. Nonevidence of an introductory statement or purpose.	☐	☐

.../6

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7. (d) Problems in Organization - Continued	Check	Rank
6. Nonevidence of a summary statement.	☐	☐
7. Other(s) (please specify) _____		
_____	☐	☐
_____		
_____	☐	☐
_____		
_____	☐	☐
_____		
(e) Mechanical Problems		
1. Spelling (please give examples below).	☐	☐
2. Punctuation.	☐	☐
3. Capitalization.	☐	☐
4. Indenting of paragraphs.	☐	☐
5. Handwriting.	☐	☐
6. Organization of page.	☐	☐
7. Use of headings and subheadings.	☐	☐
8. Other(s) (please specify) _____		
_____	☐	☐
_____		
_____	☐	☐
_____		
_____	☐	☐
_____		

Examples: _____

_____

_____ .../7

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8. What positive aspects of student writing can you identify? Use some of the criteria from #7 if you wish. Please be specific and compare with other groups of students, or with groups from previous years, if you desire.

.../8

9. Please fill out the attached Language Attitude Inventory. Please do not refer to a dictionary, thesaurus, style manual, or any other reference book.

Also, please refrain from discussing the items with others before or during your response to the inventory.

Again, anonymity and confidentiality is guaranteed!

If you would like a copy of the key to the Language Attitude Inventory please pick one up from Kiran in the EdCur. office on the main floor.

You will need to photocopy your response before mailing the original to me.

Thank you.

Trevor Gambell

APPENDIX B

Language Attitude Inventory and Key

Language Attitude Inventory*

This inventory is not a test but rather is an opportunity for you to examine your own attitudes about language, particularly the English language. The thirty-eight statements about language that follow have been shown to elicit patterns of responses indicating either a "linguistic" or a "traditional" point of view toward language on the part of thousands of preservice and inservice teachers who have taken the inventory. Although the statements offer room for debate, and although some statements inevitably measure knowledge as well as attitude, every statement has proved effective in reflecting respondents' viewpoints.

Since this is not a test, there are no right or wrong answers but only answers that will help you discover where you stand on these questions now. It is highly unlikely that anyone would respond 100 percent in one direction or the other. Your answers will most likely reflect a *trend* in one direction or the other.

Respond to every item by circling either *A* (agree) or *D* (disagree) in the left-hand column. Do not be tentative by making half-circles or by inserting qualifications like "sometimes" or "maybe." Either agree or disagree with each statement.

Following the inventory you will be referred to a discussion of what your answers appear to mean. (We encourage you *not* to look at this discussion until you have completed the self-inventory.)

A D 1. Dictionaries usually record language that the so-called best speakers and writers are using and have used, not what they will or should use.

A D 2. The traditional means of defining parts of speech such as nouns, adjectives, and the like are inconsistent. They alternate between form and function, on the one hand, and meaning on the other.

A D 3. *Like* should be used only as a preposition. "Winstons taste good like a cigarette should" is a corruption.

A D 4. Using more than one negative is wrong, for it changes the thought. Saying "I don't want no mustard" really means "I want some."

A D 5. Language is primarily a habit of behavior best learned through use.

A D 6. It's grammatically incorrect to end an English sentence with the preposition *on* as in "Turn the light on."

A D 7. Stress on any one of the three words in "I'm going home" changes the meaning of that sentence.

A D 8. Words have meanings in themselves regardless of what the speaker or listener may think they mean.

A D 9. "I have two book" might be an appropriate usage in English.

A D 10. Because society finds the word *data* useful as a singular noun, in a few years "The data is complete" may be appropriate in formal, literary usage.

A D 11. Grammar is a description of those devices by which a language governs the interrelationships among words used in that language.

A D 12. Words belong to only one part of speech, and all their other uses are borrowed.

A D 13. Colloquial language usually includes substandard usage, faulty grammar, and unpleasant repetition and should therefore be avoided.

A D 14. A dialect is a corrupt form of a language spoken in a particular region by people who don't know any better.

A D 15. Grammar treats of the principles and usages of language.

A D 16. The textbook and the dictionary make the laws of correct usage.

A D 17. We often recognize the end of a declarative sentence by a drop from high to low pitch.

A D 18. To split an infinitive, as in "I am going to quickly eat my lunch," is acceptable unless it results in awkwardness or ambiguity.

A D 19. "A train drank a book" is grammatically correct in English.

A D 20. "This here pencil is mine" is ungrammatical and always wrong in English.

A D 21. When a small child says "I taked a walk," he has demonstrated a lack of understanding of English grammar.

A D 22. English is a descendant of Latin. Thus, to understand the grammar of English we should understand the grammar of Latin.

A D 23. Understanding an English sentence requires only recognizing the words and knowing what they mean.

A D 24. Good English is that form of speech which is appropriate to the purpose of the speaker, true to the language as it is, and comfortable to the speaker and listener.

A D 25. No living language can be confined within arbitrary rules.

A D 26. The second pronunciation listed in a dictionary is to be avoided as less acceptable than the first.

A D 27. The difference between *night rate* and *nitrate* depends upon the pronunciation of the *t* and the *r* in each word.

A D 28. It can no longer be assumed that all substandard forms and language patterns are alike the country over.

A D 29. Constant change in language is normal, not corrupt.

A D 30. Words do not automatically or necessarily convey to the hearer what the speaker has in mind.

A D 31. *Father* and *my old man* both denote the male head of a family, but each expression has a different connotation.

A D 32. Good speech is not that of the grammar manuals but what is commonly used by educated speakers and reputable writers.

A D 33. The chief agent of deterioration in language has always been ignorance. Whenever enough persons persist in misusing a word long enough, the dictionary makers end by bowing to this army of error.

A D 34. English grammar teaches one how to speak and write the English language correctly.

A D 35. Popular or illiterate speech is frequently just as clear and vigorous as more cultivated language.

A D 36. *With* is always a preposition.

A D 37. Writing is speech written down.

A D 38. A person should always use the verb auxiliary *may* when asking permission.

See Appendix B for a discussion of the inventory and a key against which to check your responses.

If, now, you have completed and scored your Language Attitude Inventory, you may be newly aware of the many-sided questions that language study can raise. You may see, too, how directly a teacher's attitudes toward language can affect work done with children in the classroom. This text presents information and ideas on both language itself and language study with children in the hope that you will consider the merits of a language point of view for elementary education. Such a point of view leaves room for plenty of diversity on specific issues but is, in essence, respectful of language as a living thing. A language point of view means that the educator wishes to learn as much as possible about language so that he will understand children's language behavior better and will be able to stimulate their further language development. The historical and general information following in this chapter will contribute to such a point of view.

Key to the Language Attitude Inventory

How did you fare? The key that follows tells you whether *agreement* with each statement represents a linguistic or a traditional viewpoint. Counting up and comparing your "linguistics" and "traditionals" can provide a gross measure of your point of view toward language. It should be noted, however, that the labels "linguistic" and "traditional" refer to attitudes often held by educators, parents, and children rather than to positions taken by professional grammarians. A number of items might be marked identically by grammarians who espouse either viewpoint, while preservice and inservice teachers holding different viewpoints tend to answer differently from one another. *A* for *agreement* indicates an attitude that is:

1—Linguistic	14—Traditional	*27—Traditional
2—Linguistic	*15—Traditional	28—Linguistic
*3—Traditional	*16—Traditional	29—Linguistic
*4—Traditional	17—Linguistic	30—Linguistic
5—Linguistic	*18—Linguistic	*31—Traditional
*6—Traditional	*19—Linguistic	32—Linguistic
*7—Linguistic	*20—Traditional	33—Traditional
8—Traditional	*21—Traditional	34—Traditional
*9—Linguistic	22—Traditional	35—Linguistic
*10—Linguistic	23—Traditional	*36—Traditional
11—Linguistic	24—Linguistic	*37—Traditional
12—Traditional	25—Linguistic	*38—Traditional
13—Traditional	*26—Traditional	

Another way to analyze your responses is to examine them according to the degree of specificity in the statements. Those preceded by a dot in the key above are statements couched in very specific terms; the remainder are quite generalized. Respondents' answers to these two types of statements often differ significantly. Many times a person will agree with something as a general statement but will find that his attitudes will not let him agree with a specific instance of the same generalization; this is not altogether surprising, since language is a very personal matter. The person who disagrees with the statement, "A dialect is a corrupt form of a language spoken . . by people who don't know any better," may also disagree with the statement, " 'I have two book' might be an appropriate usage in English." In the first case, such disagreement is linguistic; in the second it is traditional. Yet the second is merely a specific example of the first.

This inventory has given you an opportunity to assess some of your values and attitudes toward language. We could not hope to discuss here the reasons why a particular response is construed as "linguistic" or "traditional" in nature. (You will probably discover that many of your "traditional" responses relate to conventions you were taught in school or at home. The term "traditional grammar," in fact, indicates that this is the traditionally accepted view of language.) Instead, you will notice the rationale for classifications such as "linguistic" and "traditional" unfolding throughout the chapters of this book. We hope you will go beyond the self-assessment provided by this inventory to examine and evaluate your own feelings about language in continuing discussion with your classmates or colleagues.

APPENDIX C

Student Spelling Errors

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SPELLING ERRORS

Correct spellings are given in parentheses for student use.

accomodate (accommodate)
acedemic (academic)
ackwardly (awkwardly)
acuire (acquire)
alliminum (aluminum)
amazement (amazement)
anix (annex)
answeres (answers)
anticapation (anticipation)
aquired (acquired)
arguement (argument)
assimulation (assimilation)
basicly (basically)
benefitial (beneficial)
benifital
benifit (benefit)
bogas (bogus)
breathe (breath)
bulliton (bulletin)
carefull (careful)
catagorice (categorize)
concerne (concern)
concesus (consensus)
coniving (conniving)
conscicuss (conscious)
cooly (coolly)
curios (curious)
curiousity (curiosity)
curousity
definately
definatly
definatsly (definitely)
definetely
definitly
develope (develop)
dicotomy (dichotomy)
dilema (dilemma)
dipicts (depicts)
disapointed (disappointed)
dissagree (disagree)
durring (during)
enhanse (enhance)

certian (certain)
ciriculum
cirricilum (curriculum)
cirriculum
evidense (evidence)
exitting (exciting)
fundimentals (fundamentals)
grammer (grammar)
halerious (hilarious)
hopped (hoped)
inate (innate)
independance (independence)
influencial (influential)
joyfullness (joyfulness)
oblivient (oblivious)
openings (openings)
parrallel (parallel)
payed (paid)
porrige (porridge)
presecence (presence)
proceedures (procedures)
propably (probably)
recieve (receive)
repatoire (repertoire)
envolve (involve)
equiptment (equipment)
escpected (expected)
escourted (escorted
excercises (exercises)
explaination (explanation)
explination
grampling (grappling)
helmut (helmet)
humourous (humorous)
inclued (included)
independant (independent)
intrest (interest)
likelyhood (likelihood)
occured (occurred)
optimisticly (optimistically)
particularily (particularly)
percieve (perceive)
posative (positive)
privelage (privilege)
priviledge
propell (propel)
relavant (relevant)
repetative (repetitive)

repoire (repair)
safty (safety)
sooth (soothe)
speach (speech)
spys (spies)
stomache (stomach)
thermometre (thermometer)
truely (truly)
ussually (usually)
virtically (vertically)

responsability (responsibility)
schreach (screech)
sourse (source)
specificly (specifically)
stich (stitch)
struted (strutted)
thouroughly (thoroughly)
ulser (ulcer)
vegitation (vegetation)

APPENDIX D

Examples of Student Writing Errors and Problems

PROBLEMS IN SYNTACTIC CONSTRUCTION

1. Sentence Fragment, Incomplete Sentence

   "The advantage of this is that it gives children an opportunity to discover."

   "Perhaps in the introduction to her lesson."

   "The only disadvantage I can think of is that if a teacher uses it in a way that doesn't allow the child to explore, and plays the part of a portrayer of all knowledge." (Also misuse of conjunction and preposition).

   "Students are given the opportunity to actively participate."

2. Comma Splice, Fused Sentence
   (Main clause joined only by a comma without a conjunction, or joined with nothing at all).

   "The teacher should also be a good model to follow, therefore when speaking to children one should use rich language with little (sic) faults." (Also usage).

   "Read poem for the last time, a student is asked to read."

   "The most important was my handwriting, it is not consistent or legible enough for the children."

   "An exercise is handed to students, this exercise is taken from their workbook."

   "This exercise was run off on a ditto machine, it was not as clear as it could have been."

   "Inform them (pupils) that Happy didn't use energy to fall into the stream, he did not do this himself, it simply happened to him."

   "I feel there could have been many reasons for this: there was a substitute teacher there that day and most of the children were unsettled by that, it was Friday afternoon, a class was having a period of skating outside the window, the lesson may have been too long."

3. Run-on or Strung-together Sentences
   (More than two main clauses unless they are short, of the same pattern, or separated by semicolons).
   "Female child was expected to grow up and be like mother and same for the male child he had to grow up and be like father."

4. Subject-verb Agreement

   "Questions and answers is what a scientist lives for."

   "A comparison of past and present events were made."

5. Pronoun-antecedent Agreement

   "A person in today's society has many problems they will have to face."

   "Each person follows the same sequence but the rate at which they progress varies greatly."

   "Each group will present their list."

   "Give everyone a chance for their own opinion."

   "Each of the phases are related."

   "If I am simply to point out all the childs (sic) mistakes and ask him to re-copy his story they are not gaining anything." (Also usage).

   "I wanted to allow each child a greater opportunity to tell their story."

   ". . . if you love someone they are beautiful to you."

   "It is through deep writing that one gains insight into themselves."

6. Pronoun Reference

   ". . . for this exercise to be of value one must really get involved in how and what you enter into the journal."

7. Verb Tense: Wrong form, improper sequence, needless shift

   "If I was to record all the different types of human behaviour into a microchip and store it away for future

generations to see I'm sure that they couldn't understand many of the actions." (Also pronoun-antecedent agreement).

8. Misplaced Modifiers (especially dangling participles)

"Mainly because of the time and experience factors."

9. Misplaced Clause or Phrase

"The best way and the only if you wish them to talk is to only have one budyie per class."

"The students should understand the processes and skills of science so that they can (ask) for opinions and gather data using scientific methods and not base their theories and ideas upon the supernatural and improve concepts."

10. Others: Misuse of Prepositions and Conjunctions; Split Verb Phrases

"The students look at ideas of what the answers are they are looking for."

". . . plus a larger container which they can add a specific amount of water in."

". . . will hopefully begin."

"This is an area which I will have to give a great deal of thought."

"Children's minds are a treasury for imaginative events, stories, etc. and what an excellent vehicle for one to monopolize on."

". . . those times were usually periods in my life which were unsure."

11. Redundancy/Repetition

". . . and probably not of much interest to many except for to somebody who wanted . . ."

". . . to get off of the train." (Also usage).

". . . it allows me to reflect back on the past."

This compilation presents a variety of problems including comma splice, usage, word choice, lack of sentential coherence, incomplete sentences, misuse of prepositions, split verb phrases, and combinations of these.

The course is the first year compulsory Education course.

Subject: Education 100.6 Liberties with the Language!

From time to time, you have asked me to provide you with samples of the sorts of things that Education 100 students write which raise my eyebrows. Here are a few drawn from three days of festive marking.

"He explained every part separately also giving us a demonstration on how the act was supposed to be preformed."

"Teaching practices which I would try to implicate into my standards are clearer communication instituted towards my class."

"Discipline can be ennucited in different aspects."

"Conglomerating all these different teaching practices I feel that I as a person or a teacher may be deficient in some areas."

"Most students only know one language and if I could better their vocabulary the better it would be for them."

"There are some other deficiences I would like to rid myself off."

"In the next three years I hopefully can improve on these areas so tht I can become a better teacher and for the most a better person."

"The extra cost to hire extra staff or maybe it's just that the teacher doesn't want to go through all the extra work."

"I seen in the schools and was stressed by my teacher that the students look up to you as a source of information."

"I hope to rid myself of any discriminate thoughts."

"To keep your body disciplined if you happen to be a Phys Ed teacher as I am for if the students in far superior shape than yourself, how can they be taught about fitness."

"The two subjects I've choosen to discuss from our student presentations are H. Bosch and Salvador Dall. They are both artist who concidering the differences in time have similarities in their works."

"There are good teaching qualities one must process or obtain within the next three to four years to become a good teach. I pocess some of the qualities but need to work on the rest. We can't all be expected to have all of these traits already, thats why were here."

"Teachers are people and have to be flexible and understanding to the feelings of their students. I'm flexible but teaching is difference how flexible is a person suppose to be."

One student managed to put Judy Chicago in her place!

"However she may as an artist be introduced into the ciriculum but it would be highly unlikely to see her 'Diner Party' in the school."

One student spoke for so many.

"For me to improve, I'll have to read books which have intellectual content in them."

These examples of student responses are from the first year compulsory Education course. All responses are to the same task as described. A variety of problems, syntactic, semantic, and usage, is evident.

Students were asked to write a description of the most outstanding teacher they have known. Maximum length: 3 pages

He is well motivated in everything he does, whether he is within or outside the schooling system.

He has set the necessary goals to develope the confidence and respect of the students, and his technique usage is found very affective also.

His unique style of teaching has the students categorize him separate from the average teachers.

After school confident students will come freely with any difficulties in there studies in that class and from other classes.

Many teachers lack the important qualities that Mr. Johnson has, and without these qualities for the student it would be much of a bother having to come to that class.

This reflection of enjoyment is visable in the students.

These characteristics are what make students like their teacher and, create classroom enjoyment.

A teacher that listens to the students and encourages them, probable will build up the students' confidence too; express themselves, to try harder, and enable them to enjoy what ever task they are doing.

But in the same way, if a teacher has distrust and is unenthused in what they are doing, so will be the attitude of the students.

A teacher that has these and other good characteristics, will make the classroom very desirable for both student and teacher.

This student entitled her essay "A Prominent Teacher" instead of using the term "Outstanding".

My interest being with that of a teacher I look back at those who actually taught me something -- anything.

Like most of my generation I was brought up to automatically respect my elders being those who taught me. Looking back I found that, not all knew how to present the appealing array of ideas to satisfy my spent attention.

From presentation right on through to the time of dismissal one found themselves acutely aware of the surroundings both in mind and sight.

From the respect this man gained with all of his students it lent itself to the ease he had with control.

This is a kindergarten that I worked very closely with during my last year of working as a teacher's aide.

She made going to school very exciting and enjoyable, not only for her class but also for her and myself.

She always tried to encouraged anyone that may be having trouble.

She made good use of teaching aides that were at the school, such as learning centres, peek kits, language masters, learning letters, films, and many other useful activities.

She was very active in the community and teaches some of her students in Sunday School and figure skating.

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